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ABSTRACT

The use of restitution (requiring the child to compensate for damage he/she causes) and timeout for destructive behavior was investigated with 21 emotionally disturbed children (9 to 13 years old) in a residential school and treatment program. Staff were instructed to interrupt destructive behavior as quickly as possible and use the restitution procedure whenever feasible. Timeout was implemented if necessary. Analysis of observations revealed that the use of restitution with 144 incidents of destructive behavior resulted in seven subsequent destructive behavior incidents, repesenting a reoccurrence rate of 4.8 percent. Timeout, used for 67 incidents, resulted in 30 subsequent destructive behavior episodes, reflecting a 44.7 percent reoccurrence rate. Staff choice between the two procedures apparently reflected the available time. Student reaction appeared to consider restitution as a matter of justice while timeout tended to be seen as punishment. (CL)

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The Use of Restitution and Time-Out for Destructive Behavior in Emotionally Disturbed Children

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Council for Exceptional Children

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Abstract

The use of restitution and time-out for destructive behavior in emotionally disturbed children was investigated. Both techniques were found successful with restitution producing superior results. Restitution was recommended for its educative and logical consequence properties.

Destructive behavior that results either in damage to property or general environmental disruption is a problem frequently encountered in educational programming for emotionally disturbed children. This highly visible and disruptive behavior frequently produces a contagion reaction from other children which can disrupt the entire group process. Techniques that can be identified that modify destructive behavior will contribute to both individual treatment success and group learning opportunities.

Restitution is a simple correctional procedure that requires the child to make up for (repair or eliminate) any damage he causes (Foxx, 1974). Restitution has the properties of being both a logical consequence of the destructive behavior (Shrigley, 1979) and educative because the child is taught to perform a restorative act. Restitution has been found effective (Azrin and Armstrong, 1973) but overcorrection (which requires the child to restore the disrupted situation to a better state than existed before the disruption) (Azrin and Wesolowski, 1974) has been found to be more effective (Foxx and Azrin, 1972; Azrin, Gottlieb, Hughart, Wesolowski and Rahn, 1975). Overcorrection has also been found to be ineffective under some circumstances (Ollendick and Matson, 1978; Rapoff, Altman and Christophersen, 1980) and in one study the procedures were considered too demanding for the staff to implement (Kelly and Drabman, 1977).

Time-out is a term that frequently appears in clinical behavioral literature. It is a shortened or abbreviated term for response-contingent time-out from the availability of positive reinforcement. Time-out has been generally defined and its appropriate use considered to be restricting access to positive reinforcement (Hewett and Taylor, 1968; Leitenberg, 1965; Plutchik, Karasu, Conte, Siegel and Jarrett, 1978). Time-out represents an attempt to place the child in an area that is as free of reinforcement as possible in an attempt to

eliminate an undesired behavior. It is the assumption that the behavior will be eliminated because the child no longer has access to the reinforcer.

Contrary to much of the time-out literature, time-out, as a behavioral intervention, does not constitute punishment (Stainback, Stainback and Dedrick, 1979; O'Dell, Krug, Patterson and Faustman, 1980). Punishment involves the presentation of an aversive stimulus whereas time-out procedures lead to removal of positive reinforcement contingent upon a response (Sulzer-Azaroff and Mayer, 1977, p. 142). It has been suggested that time-out itself is aversive (Spitalnik and Drabman, 1976; Steeves, Martin and Pear, 1970) however it has been found to be too mild as an aversive event to be effective (Holtz, Azrin and Ayllen, 1963).

The present study was designed to investigate the relative effectiveness of restitution and time-out on the destructive behavior of emotionally disturbed children. Though overcorrection was supported to a greater degree by the research literature, restitution was used because it was considered less intrusive and a more reasonable use of available staff time. A time-out procedure that involved removal and isolation was also employed.

METHOD

Subjects

Subjects were 21 emotionally disturbed children (CA range, 9-13 years) served in a 20-bed capacity residential school and treatment program. Subjects were diagnosed moderately/severely emotionally disturbed (DSM III categories - attention deficit disorder and conduct disorder) and randomly selected from all children served by the facility over a period of six years. All subjects were male, white and of normal intelligence.

Treatment Program

The residential program employed a treatment modality generally described as a therapeutic milieu. Children received both individual and group psychotherapy and special education. The classrooms and the living units were located in the same building. Children lived in two units of ten children generally organized by chronological age. Behavior modification procedures targeted behaviors considered both inappropriate for group living in the residential program as well as inappropriate behaviors obstructing reintegration into normal family units and public school settings. Professional staff implementing behavior modification procedures included classroom teachers and residential child care workers.

Restitution was identified as a behavior modification technique appropriate for incidents that involved property destruction or disruption of the physical environment. Restitution which involved only correction to the original state was preferred by staff members because it was considered both less intrusive and less aversive than the use of overcorrection. Though both correction and overcorrection require the direct supervision of staff, it was anticipated that

restitution would take less staff time than overcorrection and, therefore, be more efficient.

The use of time-out as a behavior modification procedure was identified as a technique that would allow the program to continue serving destructive children by minimizing the effect of these children on the treatment program of other children. The child displaying destructive behavior could be removed from the group, thereby reducing possible contagion while simultaneously modifying the individual child's behavior. It was postulated that time-out would require minimal staff time to implement.

Procedure

Destructive behavior was considered to be any behavior that resulted in property damage or disruption of the physical environment irregardless of damage. Staff were instructed to interrupt any destructive behavior as quickly as possible and use the restitution procedure whenever feasible. If the behavior had resulted in some contagion reaction from other children or if insufficient time to supervise restitution was available, the time-out procedure could be implemented.

The restitution procedure required the direct supervision of a staff member. The staff instructed the child who had exhibited destructive behavior exactly what was necessary to correct the result of his behavior. If the child had turned over furniture he must return the furniture to its original place. If some damage had occured the child must clean up any mess and repair the damage. The staff was instructed to make a positive verbal remark when restitution was completed.

Time-out involved placing the child in a separate room used exclusively for time-out. The 8 by 15 foot room was bare, contained no outside window and was

lighted by a single fixture. The room was appropriately ventilated and the child could be observed through a small window in the locked door. The child was verbally directed to the time-out room and was physically placed in time-out only when this directive was refused. Staff were instructed to inform the child of the inappropriate behavior when placed in time-out and repeat the procedure when the time-out was concluded. Staff were also instructed to encourage the child not to repeat the behavior. Duration of time-out was contingent on the discontinued display of destructive behavior. The staff was instructed to check children in the time-out room every five minutes.

All destructive behaviors were described and recorded in detail on a behavior incident report. Any subsequent destructive behavior that occurred within 15 minutes was recorded in the same manner and considered part of the original incident. Destructive behaviors that occurred more than 15 minutes after the original incident were considered a new incident and recorded accordingly.

RESULTS

Figure 1 illustrates both the occurrence and reoccurrence of destructive behavior using both restitution and time-out. The use of restitution with 144 incidents of destructive behavior resulted in 7 subsequent destructive behavior incidents. This represents a reoccurrence rate of 4.8 percent. The use of time-out with 67 incidents of destructive behavior resluted in 30 subsequent destructive behavior incidents. This represents a reoccurrence rate of 44.7 percent.

Observation of staff choice between restitution and time-out procedures revealed that restitution was used more often during school hours and recreation periods. Time-out was used more often during wake-up, bedtime and meal times. It was clear that staff considered the available time as the major basis of procedure choice.

Observation of the reaction of the children to the two procedures varied. Though some children resisted both procedures there was a general reaction to restitution as "just" where time-out was more often than not considered a punishment.

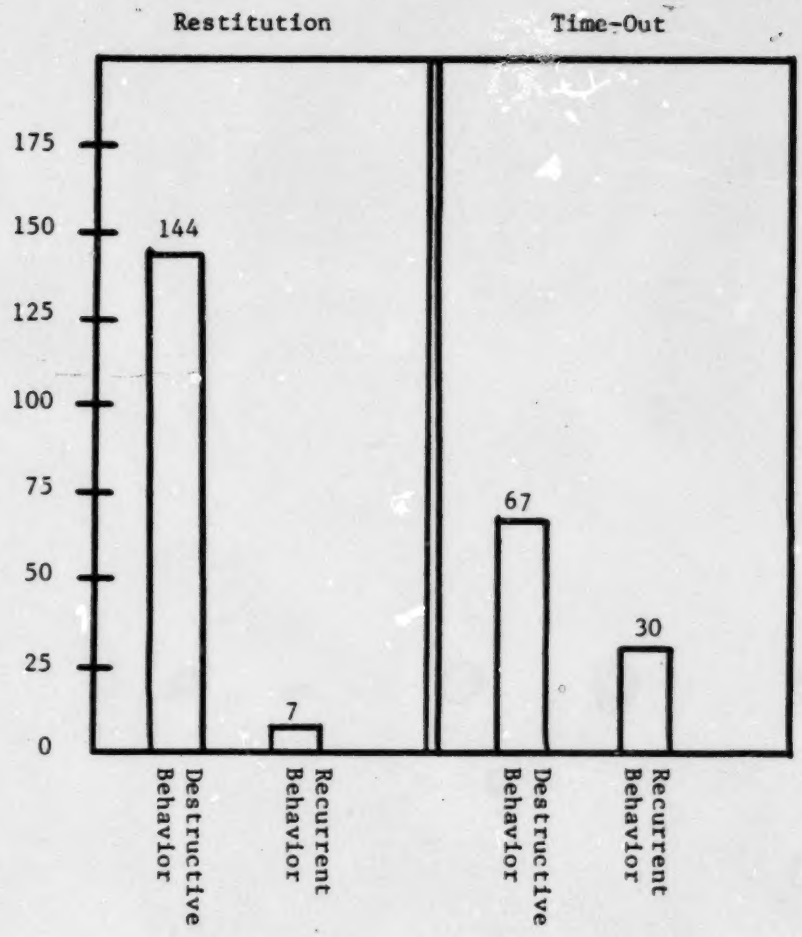

Figure 1

Occurrence and reoccurrence of destructive behavior using both restitution and time-out procedures.

SUMMARY

Both restitution and time-out reduced the reoccurrence of destructive behavior, but the results of the restitution procedure were clearly superior. The restitution procedure, by its very design, represents a logical consequence of destructive behavior. It can be viewed as both educative and non-punitive.

Time-out is clearly an intrusive procedure. The consequence of removal and isolation appears to have no direct relationship to the destructive behavior. Though certainly a mildly aversive event, time-out would not appear to be a punisher because the sharp drop of inappropriate behavior when using punishment procedures was not observed (Smith, 1981).

Unlike a previous study (Foxx and Azrin, 1972) that reported simple correction (restitution) to be ineffective and overcorrection to be effective in treating aggressive and disruptive conduct by retarded persons, this study found the less intrusive restitution procedure to be highly satisfactory. Perhaps the aggressive and disruptive behavior was more resistant than the destructive behavior examined in this study.

The selection of the restitution or time-out procedure was based primarily on the availability of staff time. Restitution requires the undivided attention of the staff whereas time-out can be implemented with minimal investment of staff time. The difference in success rate demonstrated however, recommends program planning and staffing patterns that would facilitate the use of restitution. Coupled with staff preference, restitution can be recommended for its educative and logical consequence properties. Time-out, though effective, was considered more instrusive and included the possibility of selection based on staff rather than child need.

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